



30 SEP 1935

SUBJECT: Guatemalan Government Request for Pre-Election Assistance

3. There is good evidence that the insurgents are going to make an effort to disrupt the elections in those areas in which they have the force and influence to do so. In our view, however, they cannot seriously affect the outcome in the countryside. The government has good control of all the major population centers and larger villages. Although the guerrillas may be able to prevent some voters from coming to the polls, we expect only a relatively insignificant number of voters to be involved. The guerrillas are also engaged in a propaganda campaign to describe the elections as a farce and to encourage voters to nullify ballots as a sign of protest. This campaign may produce a fair number of null votes, as it did in last July's Constituent Assembly elections, but in our opinion it will not seriously affect the overall process or outcome. The majority of Guatemalans seem to want to vote, and all signs are that a large electoral turnout will materialize.

~~SECRET~~

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: FEB 2002

183

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

4. In our opinion the danger of urban unrest, and its possible effect on the electoral process, is much greater than any danger presently represented by the insurgency. We have just gone through a period in which the government was under great stress, and the economic situation continues to deteriorate. Gas rationing begins 26 September, and there is a possibility that the situation could get out of hand before the election. Despite the problems, however, we continue to feel that the present government will stick it out and that the high command is still determined to hold elections no matter what problems and difficulties must be fended off. The government also seems to have the support of the vast majority of Army officers. Another strong point in the government's favor is that, despite widespread dissatisfaction with the present situation in almost all elements of local society, the majority of Guatemalans really do not want the electoral process to collapse. They realize that if it does the consequences for the country would be enormous. Accordingly, we expect that this awareness would act as an inhibiting factor in terms of urban violence and unrest in the coming weeks.

5. Transportation for rural voters is available to some extent and many rural Guatemalans are used to walking long distances in any case. Voting stations will be set up in all major and most minor population centers, and this will allow the vast majority of the people who are interested in voting to do so. The rest of the population consists of campesinos who are either too isolated, ignorant, or indifferent to vote in any case, and in our view this group is not statistically important in terms of the electoral process. We saw many examples in last July's Constituent Assembly elections of Indians and other campesinos walking ten or fifteen miles to vote, and we expect that they will do so again in this election. Many rural Guatemalans are used to walking long distances, and the walk to the polls in and of itself will not unduly deter them from voting. Transportation in the cities could be something of a problem if gas rationing is still in effect at the time of the election. We assume that the government will devise some way of providing sufficient gasoline for public transport vehicles on election day, but even so, there will be some shortages and glitches as was the case last July.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

6. Police and security forces have only a limited rapid reaction capability due to lack of vehicles. They also have deficiencies in terms of communications equipment. Riot police in the capital, as the Mission has reported before, have severe shortages of protective gear, gas masks, tear gas, and so on. Despite these problems, our estimate is that the security forces can cope with the situation unless unrest in the capital gets completely out of hand.

7. Many of the items requested by the Guatemalan government are extremely important to the counterinsurgency campaign and the longer term stability of the country. However, even in the very unlikely event that any large quantity of the items on the list could arrive before the elections, we do not feel that most of the items would be of significant value to the government in meeting the challenge of the coming weeks. Accordingly, we would recommend that the bulk of this list might better be considered part of a post-electoral support package for the new president, rather than a pre-electoral measure. One problem we are sure to face here after the elections is that, rightly or wrongly, most Guatemalans are expecting elections to bring about a renewal of U.S. military aid, and probably accelerated economic aid as well. Failure to make some symbolic gesture in this regard would have very negative effects here and would make many military officers feel that perhaps the elections were not worth it after all. Guatemalan officers saw the immediate and significant military aid, undoubtedly planned months in advance by the Soviets, which began arriving in Nicaragua on the night of Ortega's election. At that time General Lobos half-jokingly mused that perhaps Guatemala had the wrong ally. Once the elections are held, and we do not deliver any increase in aid, Guatemalan officers will undoubtedly contrast this situation quite unfavorably with the Soviet Union's very visible, immediate, and dramatic support for Nicaragua.

8. Between now and election time, Guatemala's immediate need is much more for economic assistance than for helicopters and patrol boats. Fuel is very scarce at a critical time in the agricultural year, and the Guatemalans literally do not know how they are going to pay for their next tanker load. Some of this is obviously their own fault, but if something is not done soon to help them pay their

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

petroleum bill and guarantee orderly arrivals of petroleum shipments until the turnover of power, our interests here will be in serious and continuing jeopardy. In our view, the best and perhaps least complicated thing that the U.S. Government could do for Guatemala right now would be to provide immediate cash assistance to help the Guatemalans work out the petroleum problem. With that settled, the Guatemalans could probably handle the rest themselves.

'9. The above information is being provided in this form because it does not meet our criteria for dissemination as an intelligence information report.

[REDACTED]

Chief, Latin America Division